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Corps aids hurricane recovery

"It is one of the beautiful compensations of this life that no one can sincerely try to help another without helping himself."

–Charles Dudley Warner

By Mary Beth Thompson
Public Affairs Office

At press time, Baltimore District had deployed 45 employees to provide emergency support along the Gulf Coast in response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Eight more were preparing to join the recovery efforts.These employees are serving or will serve among the thousands of Corps employees who are working in the affected areas.

"We've gotten a lot of people who have put their names in," said Maria de la Torre, acting chief of Emergency Management. Some volunteers left immediately. Others are making themselves available in one or two weeks or after fiscal year end, she said.

Seven District employees are supplying debris removal expertise. Fifteen are fulfilling quality assurance responsibilities. Others are providing engineering, contracting, real estate, roofing, housing, communications, logistics and administrative skills.

Baltimore District Commander Col. Robert J. Davis traveled to Baton Rouge Sept. 8 to assist with command and control of the Corps' overall effort. He served at a forward command post where the Corps is co-located with the Federal Emergency Management Agency as chief of staff to Maj. Gen. Don T. Riley, the Corps' task force commander. Davis returned at the end of September.

(Photo by James T. Pogue, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Louisiana Recovery Field Office for Hurricane Katrina)

Mission Manager Jim Dash from Baltimore District goes over daily debris numbers with administrative assistant Brenda Watkins of Memphis District. Contractors have removed more than a million cubic yards of hurricane debris from the New Orleans area in this effort spearheaded by the Baltimore District project delivery team.

"Corps of Engineers teams, now comprised of more than 3,000 employees throughout Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Texas, are doing tremendous work in Katrina recovery operations," Davis wrote in an email message from Louisiana.

"To say we're busy is an understatement," wrote Jim Dash of Planning Division, who is working debris removal in Louisiana.

"I've had a few helicoptor rides that have changed my life and seen some really amazing things," Dash said.

On Aug. 28, the District's Rapid Response Vehicle, or RRV, normally stationed at Fort McHenry, moved to Maxwell Air Force Base,

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Commander's Comment

Resilience

By LT. COL. J.T. HAND
Deputy District Engineer

I awoke the other morning realizing that it was two years ago that day that our District felt the wrath of Tropical Storm Isabel, a storm that affected hundreds of thousands of residents in Virginia, Maryland and throughout the Mid-Atlantic region. The vestiges of Isabel remain today in the woods at Aberdeen Proving Ground where my children and I wander on the weekends.

Hundred-year old poplar and sycamore trees toppled like dominoes that September 2003 day, yet remained tethered to the earth by the merest strand of root. These majestic behemoths that once provided a shaded canopy quickly became bridges and balance beams across which children and parent alike precariously traversed imaginary canyons of lava.

In the past two weeks, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita have ravaged the coasts of Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas forcing millions of Americans to displace. The images broadcast across print and electronic media have been sobering in their profanity. Americans, citizens of the greatest nation on earth, fled their homes in the wake of these two near-sequential storms. Into the fray stepped the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Today, more than 2,900 Corps employees, over 40 from the Baltimore District, are supporting recovery operations in Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas.

The hurricane damage and ruin is so widespread that even sitting commanders like our own have been called to the region. Col. Davis has been in Louisiana for weeks supporting the planning and execution of recovery efforts.

When hurricanes or other emergencies strike, the Corps always responds. To prepare for that response, framework is hammered into position ahead of time. Contracts for water, ice and debris removal are ready so that the Corps, as part of the Federal Emergency Management team, can react quickly to the basic needs of the victims.

In Baltimore District, we are not among those directly affected by these disasters, but we see Americans suffering. At home, the price of gas, just like housing, goes up and up again. People are deployed, and resources are stretched. The constant negative news can have a demoralizing effect. In these challenging times, it is more important than ever to remain alert and vigilant and to move forward on the tasks at hand.

It took 18 months to dispose of the debris from Hurricane Andrew, and as destructive as Andrew was, the area struck then was far more concentrated than the expanse affected by Katrina and Rita. Cleaning the debris from the Gulf Coast region will not be a quick mission. The Corps will need to support recovery operations for two years while continuing to conduct its day-to-day business well.

Many volunteers will be needed to sustain the recovery effort. Volunteers will be wanted through holiday seasons, which are difficult times to be away from home. Volunteers will be needed well after hurricane coverage has left the front pages. Even after the media ceases to pay attention to the story at all, the call for the nation's problem solvers — the Corps — to support our fellow Americans will still be there.

Two years after Isabel and two weeks after Katrina, I took a walk in the woods under sunny skies. From a distance, enormous voids remain in the shaded canopy behind my quarters at Aberdeen Proving Ground. But as I walk through the woods, I can no longer traverse those imaginary bridges.

Sinewy roots that spanned the gap between tree and soil tenuously clung to the earth after Isabel and, through shear determination and resilience, clung to life. My bridges that once spanned 100 feet are now impassable. Hundreds of leaved branches reach skyward toward the sun, striving to replace the canopy that Isabel stole.

In Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas, American citizens have been clinging to life as well. Through determination, resilience and with the help of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and this nation, they too will recover.

Essayons.

Hurricane support

(continued from cover)

Ala. The 36-foot vehicle had been prepositioned in anticipation of Hurricane Katrina. It is now in Beaumont, Texas, in support of respose to Hurricane Rita.

The vehicle, a mobile communications station, is equipped with laptop computers, office software, global positioning system equipment, satellite communications, cellular phone, drafting and mapping software, and wireless capability to network laptops within 200 feet of the RRV. Corps, FEMA and U.S. Forest Service personnel use the RRV to coordinate emergency support at its location.

Katrina and Rita are the third and fourth hurricanes to which Baltimore District's employees have responded in 2005.

Corps' mission

In an emergency situation, the Corps' mission is to work primarily in support of FEMA with removing debris, constructing temporary housing, repairing roofs and providing emergency ice, water and power. Currently, the Corps' Katrina and Rita response missions total $3.72 billion.

The statistics increase daily, but at press time the Corps had:

- delivered 5,772 truckloads of water;
- delivered 4,782 truckloads of ice;
- installed 143 generators;
- installed almost 20,000 temporary roofs, with 63,000 projects to take place for Katrina alone;
- removed more than 5 million cubic yards of debris, with an estimated total of 42 million cubic yards to be removed for Katrina. Estiamtes for Rita were not available.

The Corps is using portable buildings to restore some public facilities, such as police and fire stations, city halls, classrooms and post offices in some locations.

Working with the city of New Orleans and private contractors, the Corps continues to pump out floodwaters from New Orleans and the immediate vicinity into Lake Ponchartrain, averaging billions of gallons a day

Corps' team in New Orleans

During and after disasters, the Corps of Engineers "victim district team concept" is often put into place. Col. Richard Wagenaar, New Orleans District commander, has shifted his attention to reconstituting the district. Col.Duane Gapinski of the Rock Island District has taken the lead on unwatering the city of New Orleans.

New Orleans District has now accounted for nearly every one of its 1,193 employees. At press time, between 75 and 100 were working at the emergency operations centers, and another 150 were returning to work.

The plan to reconstitute the district has three phases: 1) immediately place essential staff at existing offices in Vicksburg, Lafayette and St. Louis or by telework; 2) place other employees when space and communications capabilities are available in Vicksburg, Jackson and Clinton, Miss.; in Lafayette and Baton Rouge, La.; and at other sites or by telework; and (3) transition to the New Orleans office when the facility is available.

(Information for this article was obtained from official Baltimore District and Corps sources and reports.)

(Photo by Chris Heichel, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District serving in Louisiana)

Chris Heichel and Joe Avery, Baltimore District Operations Division employees from Tioga-Hammond & Cowanesque Lakes, perform quality assurance at this debris reduction site in Louisiana.

(Photo by Joanie Collins, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District serving in Texas)

Corps and Federal Emergency Management workers use the Corps' Rapid Response Vehicle's communications capabilities in Texas during response to Hurricane Rita.

Flood reduction projects worth the cost

By CHRISTOPHER AUGSBURGER
Public Affairs Office

The tragic loss of life and wide-spread destruction caused by the recent hurricanes along the Gulf coast highlights the need for effective flood reduction projects, such as levees, dams, floodwalls and other local flood protection projects. Within the Baltimore District, Corps-operated flood control reservoirs and Corps-built and locally-maintained flood protection projects help lessen the overall flood impacts and damages that occur in the Susquehanna River and Potomac River basins. These projects annually protect communities from New York to Washington, D.C. from millions – and sometimes billions – of dollars in property damage.

While these flood protection projects may never see the force of a Hurricane Katrina or Hurricane Rita, the danger for catastrophic destruction from high water events still exists.

Corps-operated flood control projects help reduce flood damage by combining structural engineering with water control expertise.

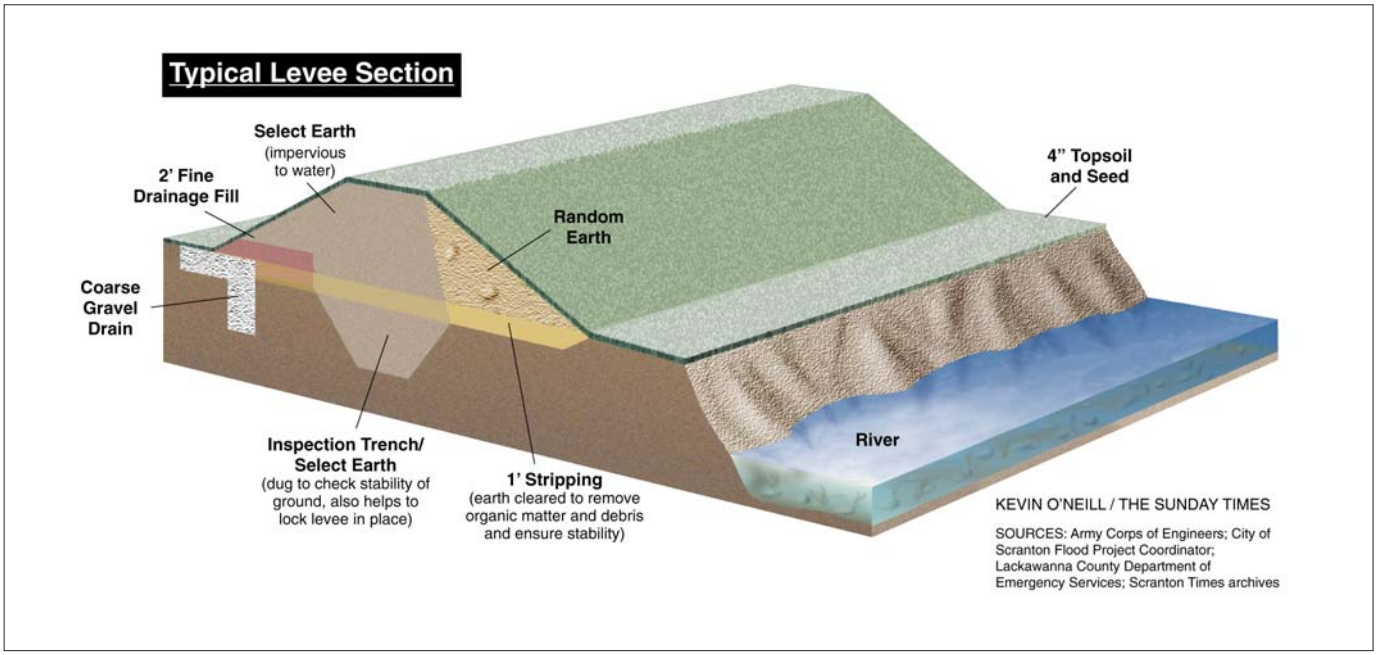
The first line of defense starts before the water rises. For Corps-managed dams, such as the ones at Raystown, Jennings-Randolph, Tioga-Hammond and Cowanesque, it starts in District headquarters where water control experts keep a close eye on the dams, stream gages and weather and flood forecasts from the National Weather Service. They also keep in constant communication with dam tenders.

"Most of our gages are automated, so we're able to have frequent updates as to the height of the water in streams and other tributaries that lead into the main rivers, along with what the water is doing at our dams," said Julia Fritz, a water control manager in Engineering Division.

Fritz and other water control experts staff the office around the clock during high water events to ensure that the latest information from the gages, dams and forecasts is discerned and relayed to the dam tenders and other key personnel. In extreme cases, when the Emergency Operations Center is activated, that information helps leadership make crucial decisions.

Once the water rises and the event is in full swing, the flood control projects do their work. In towns protected by levees, the specially designed structures contain the water by using an impenetrable clay-like material at their core to preserve the integrity of the structure, according to Jim Snyder, the Civil Works foundations and dams section leader.

Drains along the base of the land side of the levee collect



any water that may have seeped under, while pumps carry rain water over the levee and into the river. At the dams, operators strategically open and close flood gates to control the flow of water. The goal is to prevent downstream communities from being overwhelmed by water and debris.

"It's a balancing act at the reservoirs — hold back water to prevent downstream flooding, but keep the reservoir level safely below the spillway and dam crest," said Larry Mathena, a civil engineer in Operation Division. Spillways safely release water from the reservoir so it doesn't overtop the dam crest.

Corps-built structures have a history of success. As the 2005 fiscal year drew to a close, District flood control projects prevented about $376 million in damage primarily from two high-water events that occurred in January and March, according to Joe Ignatius, chief of Flood Control and Natural Resources. In 2004, following Hurricane Ivan, District flood reduction projects prevented nearly $1.6 billion in damages, holding back an estimated 135 billion gallons of water.

The Corps began constructing flood reduction projects after historic rains and flooding pounded the Northeast portion of the country in the 1930s and 1940s, prompting Congress to take action.

"Baltimore District began construction of their dams, levees and flood walls after Congress passed the Flood Act of 1936," said Ignatius.

Over the next 70 years, the District constructed 58 local flood protection projects in the form of levees, flood walls, dams and a number of smaller projects that focus on storm water runoff and shoreline erosion.

The District is in the midst of improving, inspecting and upgrading projects, such as raising the height of the levees in Wyoming Valley, Pa., and investigating design improvements at Jennings-Randolph dam. Engineers also conduct annual inspections, instrumentation monitoring, evaluations and emergency responses throughout the life of Corps-built levee systems.

The Corps continues to build new flood reduction projects. A $9.3 million contract was awarded for the construction of levees in the communities of Plot and Green Ridge in Scranton, Pa., and the Corps is also investigating the provision of flood reduction for Montoursville and Bloomsburg, Pa.

(U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District photo)

Water rises towards the top of a levee in Hanover Township, Pa., during Hurricane Ivan in September 2004.

(U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District photo)

A specially designed roller gate at a flood reduction project in Olyphant, Pa., is rolled accorss the street and sealed with sandbags in preparation for rising water from the effects of Hurricane Ivan in 2004.

(Photo by Fred Worman, East Sidny Lake)

A high water event in April 2005 at East Sidney Lake in New York forces flood waters to rise nearly to the top of a spillway. Melting snow and rain caused flooding behind the dam to overflow into a parking lot and recreational boat launch area.

Be prepared for home fire safety

Compiled by JOHN HOUVENER
Safety Office

Every home should have at least one working smoke alarm

Buy a smoke alarm at any hardware or discount store. It's inexpensive protection for you and your family. Install a smoke alarm on every level of your home.

A working smoke alarm can double your chances of survival. Test it monthly, keep it free of dust and replace the battery at least once a year. Smoke alarms themselves should be replaced after 10 years of service, or as recommended by the manufacturer.

Prevent electrical fires

Never overload circuits or extension cords. Do not place cords and wires under rugs, over nails or in high traffic areas.

Immediately shut off and unplug appliances that sputter, spark or emit an unusual smell. Have them professionally repaired or replaced.

Use appliances wisely

When using appliances, follow the manufacturer's safety precautions. Overheating, unusual smells, shorts and sparks are all warning signs that appliances need to be shut off, then replaced or repaired.

Unplug appliances when not in use. Use safety caps to cover all unused outlets, especially if there are small children in the home.

Plan your escape

Practice an escape plan from every room in the house. Caution everyone to stay low to the floor when escaping from fire and never to open doors that are hot. Select a location where everyone can meet after escaping the house. Get out then call for help.

Caring for children

Children under 5 are naturally curious about fire. Many play with matches and lighters. Tragically, children set over 20,000 house fires every year.

Take the mystery out of fire play by teaching your children that fire is a tool, not a toy.

Alternate heaters

·Portable heaters need their space. Keep anything combustible at least three feet away.

·Keep fire in the fireplace. Use fire screens and have your chimney cleaned annually. The creosote buildup can ignite a chimney fire that could easily spread.

·Kerosene heaters should be used only where approved by authorities. Never use gasoline or camp-stove fuel. Refuel outside and only after the heater has cooled.

Fire Prevention Week 2005: candle safety

"Use Candles with Care"—that's the theme of this year's Fire Prevention Week, Oct. 9-15.

Candles may be beautiful, but they are an increasing source of deadly home fires. According to NFPA research, candle fires have tripled over the last decade.

Even worse, children between 5 and 9 are twice as likely to die in a home candle fire as the general population.

Whether you are a firefighter, a safety advocate, a teacher or a parent, you will find everything you need at www.firepreventionweek.org to help you spread the word about this important safety topic. Check the Web site regularly as new resources are added all the time.

Underground explosion outside City Crescent garage

A large steam pipe under Baltimore Street in front of the parking entrance to the City Crescent Building exploded Sept. 3, shooting steam up through the street for most of the morning. District security cameras captured the event on video. According to security personnel on duty, the explosion sounded like a volcano, shooting steam up as high as the 10th floor.

Holiday party, giving plans underway

Set the date aside! The Baltimore District holiday party is scheduled for Dec. 16 from 11:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. This year's festivities will be held at the Arbutus Town Hall in Arbutus, Md. Transportation will be provided for personnel requiring it.

When purchasing your ticket let the salesperson know you need a ride. Tickets go on sale in early November.

The holiday party committee, which consists of Operations Division and the Employee Activities Association, have set the ticket cost at $20 per person.

The menu includes roast top round of angus beef au jus, honey glazed pit ham, grilled marinated boneless chicken breast, penne pasta, roasted red skin potatoes, side salads and more to be served buffet style. A disc jockey will play your favorite tunes and the "District Holiday Singers" will delight you with holiday songs.

The 2005 Angel Tree program that provides Christmas gifts for needy children will run from Nov. 21 to Dec. 9. More information to follow.

Give blood ... the gift of life

When: Friday, Oct. 14 from 8 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Where: 4th Floor, Room 4100, the EEOC Conference Room

Please arrange with your administrative point of contact to schedule an appointment. If you have other questions, please contact Darlene Greer, HR, ext. 2087.

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Official Business

Baltimore Newsmakers

Speakers Bureau

Mark Mendelsohn, Planning, spoke Sept. 15, to a group of science teachers at the Maryland Science Center in Baltimore about Poplar Island and water quality monitoring.